Forum

1 October 2022

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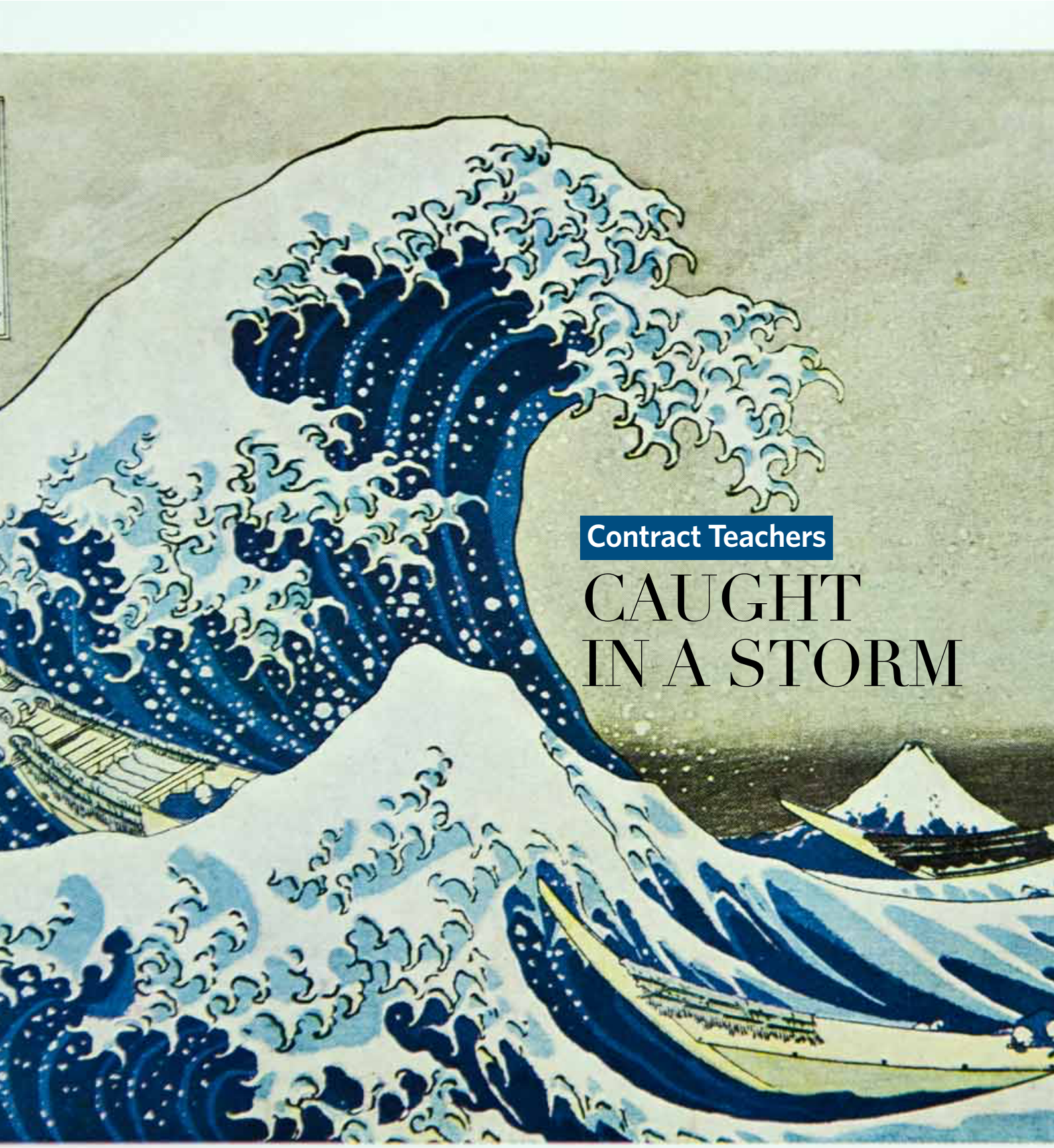

Contract Teachers

CAUGHT IN A STORM

New Monthly Magazine From Arts College Contract Teachers' Collective

Forum

1 October 2022

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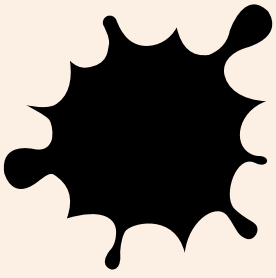
Thank you to all the colleagues for support and encouragement. Special thanks to those who have contributed articles. Feedback is most welcome and may be sent to: editor.forummagazine@gmail.com.

Put together with love and affection by B Ramakrishna

Disclaimer: All opinions expressed in these pages are that of the respective authors only, and are not to be construed as consensus opinion of the collective.



Why this? Why now?

Forum magazine is an expression of our collective identity as "Contract Teachers" and, hopefully, reflects our existential angst as well as intellectual heft. It won't be just a grievance channel, but will be a positive, forward-looking platform that benefits its readers.

As with the origins of so many publications, the idea of Forum sprouted in a shared sense of injustice and disillusionment at our situation. At the same time, neither we nor the magazine is 'one-dimensional', to use a concept of Herbert Marcuse. It will reflect our interests, pursuits, thoughts and ideas, not to mention our quirks.

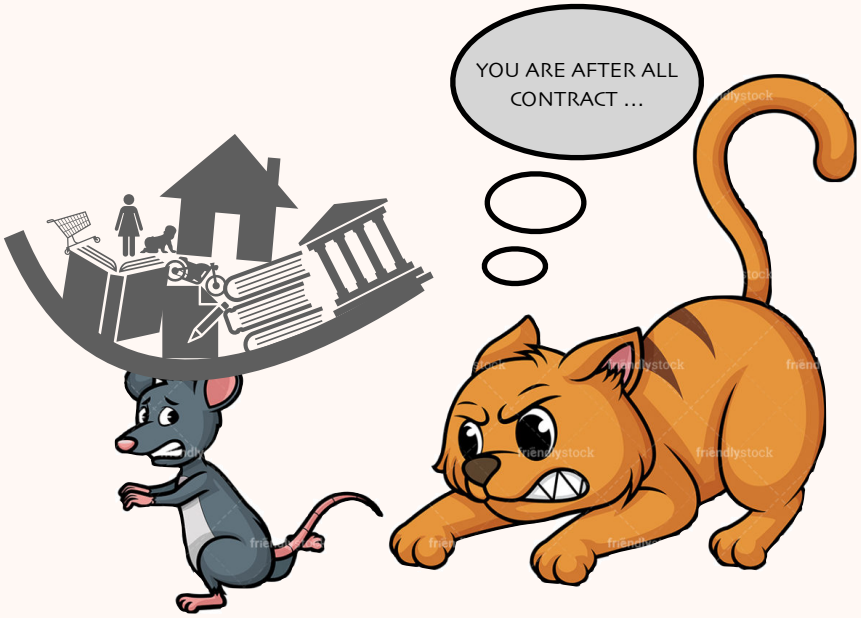
A magazine like this has been proposed and received support before we had any inkling about the administration's plans to push for an Agreement that later became an all-consuming issue of survival for all of us. So even after the Agreement issue blows over, we will continue to have things to write about.

We believe a platform like Forum will aid in capacity-building, as we take up questions that have no ready answers. Over time, the magazine might also add to the University's soft power, though power is not what we are after.

The killer chase of Contract Teachers: Season 2

B RAMAKRISHNA

Dept. of Journalism



The day was bright and sunny after three rainy ones in a row, and the faculty members were going through the routine of invigilation duties. Teachers' Day came and went. There were grumbles about the remuneration, the low regard students seemed to have for exams, and the slide in general. Things were going on, until some time in the afternoon of 7th September.

A circular from the administration to all the Principals asked that Assistant Professors (Contract) working in each college be asked to execute an 'agreement of contract for service' before the 24th. Or else, they will not be considered to be on the rolls. *Deja vu.* An equally out-of-the-blue attempt to push the same agreement was made in September last year, only to be withdrawn later. Will it meet the same fate this year too?

A key development has taken place in the interim, however: The state legislature passed a bill setting up a common recruitment board for all conventional universities in the state. This meant a step forward in the process of recruitment of regular faculty. And it amounted to a threat to the jobs of the grandly named but vastly underpaid Assistant Professors (Contract).

The terms of the agreement were the most threatening any one could think of: one senior faculty member described them as the verbal equivalent of being given a knife and being ordered to cut off one's own neck. The provisions were that the service will automatically come to an end after 364 days; the teacher can be removed without any notice if the Principal / Head is not satisfied; the teacher is not entitled to renewal, which will be at the discretion of Principal; and no weightage will be given to the service during the contract period. The seething outrage and fightback reflexes among the faculty members were given only a mild outlet in the form of a unanimous resolution to not sign the agreement. Much of it remained pent up.

A call for a protest rally on the 17th, a holiday, saw a big turnout. Among the marching teachers, everyone had a theory about the need for this 'agreement' which, in words, puts the teachers at the mercy of the administration, and in spirit, emphasises their second-class status. Everybody still has, because the administration has not thought it fit to be open about it. Marching in the noon sun and squatting on the road too failed to elicit any response.

As the deadline of the 24th September loomed, the sense of desperation increased. Some sought the intervention of Education minister Ms Sabitha Indra Reddy, who only advised the teachers to sign the agreement after revising its problematic provisions. A heated interaction with an IAS officer later revealed the extent of official support for the move.

A heated interaction with an IAS officer revealed the extent of official support for the move.

On the 22nd, two separate petitions were filed in Telangana High Court, asking for the University's order to be set aside. That evening, the Registrar had an online meeting with Principals of all colleges, and asked them to call for an urgent meeting the next day with the Assistant Professors (Contract) working in their respective colleges. Was this a sign? Maybe it was, maybe it wasn't.

Our interaction, on the 23rd, with Arts College Principal, Prof. C. Ganesh, proved most soothing. His empathetic reading of the draft agreement, his identification of the issues in it, his words of support for the teachers, his active seeking of opinions to be conveyed to the administration, and his anecdotes about different episodes in the University's life — all served to replenish the depleting sense of hope and affection for the University. And, as the teachers got up to leave, a text message arrived in a most cinematic fashion. The message conveyed the just-in-time intervention by the High Court to suspend the University's order.

The Draft Agreement

1. The [contract teacher] agrees to perform teaching work in accordance with the curriculum of the University / College for the courses from 1 October 2022 to 29 September 2023, and that he / she shall carry out further instructions given to him / her by the College Principal from time to time in the discharge of his / her duties as a teacher mentioned in this para.

2. The [C.T.] agrees after being informed that he / she is fully aware of the fact that his / her service is being taken not to fill any vacancy either on temporary or permanent basis, that he / she will be paid a consolidated amount per month during the contract period, and that his / her contract shall automatically come to an end after the expiry of the said period mentioned above or on report of a regular teacher to duty in that subject, whichever is earlier.

3. The contract period is terminable by College Principal at any time during the above said period and the [C.T.] in such case is entitled to only pro rata amount till such time. In case of termination during the above said period for any reasons, the [C.T.] is not entitled to question the correctness of the decision of the College Principal.

4. The [C.T.] is not entitled to any other perks, allowances or any other facility except for the consolidated amount payable monthly as mentioned in paras 2 and 3 above as the case may be.

5. If the [C.T.] is not willing to continue as contract faculty, he / she should give a prior notice of one month to the College Principal.

6. The work performance of [C.T.] will be judged by the Head of the concerned Department or Principal of the College or any committee constituted by the Vice Chancellor of the University.

7. The [C.T.] is not entitled to any renewal or extension or continuation of the contract on any ground whatsoever, and it shall be at the discretion of the College Principal.

8. The service rendered during the contract shall not be construed or reckoned as part of any regular appointment for any post in the University and therefore no credit or weightage will be given for the service rendered in the contract period.

9. The [C.T.] undertakes and declares that he / she may be reshuffled from the [present] College to any other College under the administrative control of the University at its discretion, during the operation of this contract.

10. Any dispute arising out of this contract shall be subject to the jurisdiction of the competent Court.

11. The relationship between the two parties is purely contractual and strictly as per the terms mentioned above.

What the Petitioners sought

To issue an order, direction or writ, more particularly one in the nature of Writ of Mandamus or any other appropriate writ to:

(i) Declare that the Petitioners are entitled for regularisation as Assistant Professor in the Respondent University as per Section 10 A of Andhra Pradesh Public Employment Regulation of Employments Regulation of appointments to Public Services and Rationalisation of Staff Pattern and Pay Structure Act 1994 (Act No 2 /1994) as adopted by State of Telangana R/w G O Ms No 16 Finance FIRM-I Department dated 26-2-2016;

(ii) Declare the action of the Respondents in insisting the petitioners to execute of Agreement of Contract for Service vide Proceedings No MR-376/132/2021-Admn I-1 dated 7-9-2022 after putting in considerable length of service as Assistant Professors contract is illegal, arbitrary, discriminatory, and in violation of Articles 14, 16, and 21 of Constitution of India;

(iii) Consequently restrain the Respondents from insisting for execution of Agreement of Contract for Service as Annexed to the Proceedings No MR-376/132/ 2021- Admn I-1 dated 7-9-2022; and

(iv) Consequently direct the Respondents to consider the cases of the petitioners for regularisation as Assistant Professor in terms of G O ms No 16 dated 26 02 2016

What the Court said:

Petition under Section 151 Civil Procedure Code praying that in the circumstances stated in the affidavit filed in support of the writ petition, the High Court may be pleased to suspend Proceedings No. MR-376/132/ 2021-Admin.I-1 dated 7-9-2022 and continue the petitioners as Assistant Professor (Contract) in 3rd Respondent University on existing terms and conditions without insisting for execution of Agreement of Contract for Service, pending disposal of WP No.37008 of 2022, on the file of the High Court. The court while directing issue of notice to the Respondents herein to show cause as to why this application should not be complied with, made the following order.

ORDER: Learned counsel for the petitioners submitted that the respondents have issued a letter dt.07.09.2022 insisting that the Assistant Professors (Contract) have to execute an agreement of contract on or before 24.09.2022 and if any of the said Professors fails to submit the said agreement of contract within the stipulated period, he/she shall be deemed 'as not on rolls'. The said letter is also signed by the Principal of the University College of Science, Saifabad, Hyderabad, stating that the bond has to be submitted immediately.

Learned counsel for the petitioners submits that the petitioners have been working for the past 20 years in the respondent University and because of the said letter, they are facing threat of discontinuance if they do not sign the agreement of contract for service. It is submitted that such a letter is contrary to the principle laid down by the judgment of the Supreme Court in the case of Manish Gupta and another versus President, Jan Bhagidari Samiti and others in Civil Appeal N0s.3084-3088 of 2022 arising out of SLP (Civil) No. 12946 -12950 of 2017, dt.21,04.2022.

Having regard to the above submissions and the judgment of the Supreme Court cited supra, the impugned letter dt.07.09,2022 is suspended as prayed for, and the Assistant Professors who do not sign such contract shall not be victimised by discontinuance of their services.

Date of next hearing: 26 October 2022

Manish Gupta and Another vs. President, Jan Bhagidari Samiti and Others

April 21, 2022 Civil Appeal Nos. 3084-3088 of 2022
By Justices L. Nageswara Rao and B.R. Gavai, Supreme Court of India

(Relevant excerpts only)

3. The facts in the present case are taken from Writ Petition (Civil) No. 4716 of 2016.

5. Vide the Government Circular/Order dated 5th October, 2001, the State Government decided to start some courses on a self-financing basis. For the said courses, the appointments were to be made on contractual/tenure basis and the honorarium of the teachers and other staff was to be decided by the said Committee.

6. In pursuance to the said Scheme, an advertisement came to be issued in the year 2014 for appointment of teachers as guest faculty for the Academic Year 2014-2015 in different Colleges. The writ petitioners in Writ Petition (Civil) No. 4716 of 2016, having requisite qualifications, applied to the advertised positions in pursuance to the said advertisement. Upon their selection by the duly constituted Committee, they were appointed. After the end of the Academic year, the writ petitioners were discontinued from service. Fresh advertisements were issued for the next Academic Year 2015-2016. Being aggrieved thereby, the writ petitioners approached the High Court by way of Writ Petition (Civil) No. 4716 of 2016. The said writ petition was allowed by the learned single judge of the High Court vide judgment and order dated 29th September, 2016, thereby directing that the writ petitioners therein would continue to work on their respective posts till regular selections were made. It was also directed that the writ petitioners therein were entitled to get the salary in accordance with the UGC circular issued in February, 2010.

7. Being aggrieved thereby, the State Government as well as the Presidents of the Jan Bhagidari Samitis [which manage College affairs] preferred appeals before the Division Bench of the High Court. The Division Bench of the High Court by the impugned judgment and order dated 8th February, 2017, allowed the writ appeals and set aside the judgment and order passed by the learned single judge of the High Court. Being aggrieved thereby, the present appeals by way of special leave.

8. We have heard the Shri Rana Mukherjee, learned Senior Counsel appearing on behalf of the appellants and Shri K.M. Nataraj, learned Additional Solicitor General ("ASG" for short) appearing on behalf of the respondents.

9. Shri Rana Mukherjee, learned Senior Counsel, would submit that the Division Bench of the High Court has erred in interfering with the judgment and order passed by the learned single judge. He submits that, as a matter of fact, the appellants were duly qualified and were selected in accordance with due selection process and were required to undergo the selection process in every Academic Year. He submits that the modus operandi of the Government Colleges was to engage the services of the appellants at the beginning of the Academic Session and to discontinue them at the end of the Academic Session; and again to issue fresh advertisements for the next Academic Session. In response to the same, the candidates were again required to follow the selection process to get appointed. It is therefore submitted that though there was sufficient workload for regular posts, the appellants were deprived of regular employment. It is submitted that, in any case, the appellants had not sought for regularisation. The relief claimed was only for continuation of their services till duly selected candidates were appointed. He therefore submits that the impugned judgment and order delivered by the Division Bench of the High Court deserves to be set aside.

10. Shri K.M. Nataraj, learned ASG, on the contrary, would submit that the appellants were appointed in accordance with the said Scheme. It is submitted that under the said Scheme, the Government Colleges were required to run various courses on a self-financing basis. The expenditure for the same was to be met out of the tuition fees received from the students. He submits that the appointments of appellants were neither ad hoc nor temporary. It is submitted that their services were as guest lecturers and were on contractual basis for 11 months. […] The requirement of the guest lecturers was from year to year on the basis of the number of students available for particular course(s).

12. A perusal of the advertisement dated 24th June, 2016 issued by the Principal, Government Kamla Raja Girls Post Graduate Autonomous College, Gwalior, which is at Annexure P-2 of the Appeal Paper Book and the advertisement dated 2nd July, 2016 issued by the Principal, SMS Government Model Science College, Gwalior, M.P., which is at Annexure P-3 of the Appeal Paper Book, would show that the appointments were to be made after the candidates had gone through due selection procedure. Though Shri Nataraj, learned ASG, has strenuously urged that the appointments of the appellants were as guest lecturers and not as ad hoc employees, from the nature of the advertisements, it could clearly be seen that the appellants were appointed on ad hoc basis. It is a settled principle of law that an ad hoc employee cannot be replaced by another ad hoc employee and he can be replaced only by another candidate who is regularly appointed by following a regular procedure prescribed.

16. Accordingly, we pass the following order:

(i) The writ petitioners – appellants herein would be entitled to continue on their respective posts till they are replaced by regularly selected candidates;

(ii) The writ petitioners – appellants herein would be continued on their respective posts provided that a sufficient number of students are available for the particular course(s) for which the writ petitioners – appellants herein are appointed.

(iii) The writ petitioners – appellants herein would be entitled to honorarium at the rate of Rs. 1,000/- per hour as is being paid to them presently.

17. Pending application(s), if any, shall stand disposed of. There shall be no order as to costs.

Here we are

Here we are: on a long road and forever at a crossroads. Here we are: in a career of our choice but constantly on the look out. Here we are: doing our best and also at risk of being thrown out. Here we are: happy inside the classroom, and also anxious once out of it. Here we are: adding decades to our service, only to see it counted as the time wasted.

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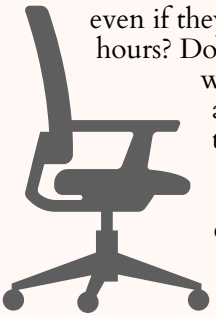
Why are you here?



Do we ask this question to people who continue to work as sales assistants in shops even if they have to stand for at least eight hours? Do we put this question to people who till the land, sow the seeds and take care of the crop even if the harvest is not in their hands? Do individuals have the luxury of waiting till the political economy is more favourable? Is the fact of our existence more troubling, or is it our questions?

***

The fact

The fact is that we are actually not on the great Osmania ship. The fact is that we are in little boats of our own. The fact is that we are just being useful to the big ship when it needs. No matter how hard we row, the boat is our fact.

To select us,
the University used
One of the options available to it.
To employ us,
the University used
One of the methods available to it.
To pay us,
the University used
One of the means available to it.
To remove us,
the University may as well use
One of the powers available to it.
But to do justice to us,
the University says
It has no heart to do it.

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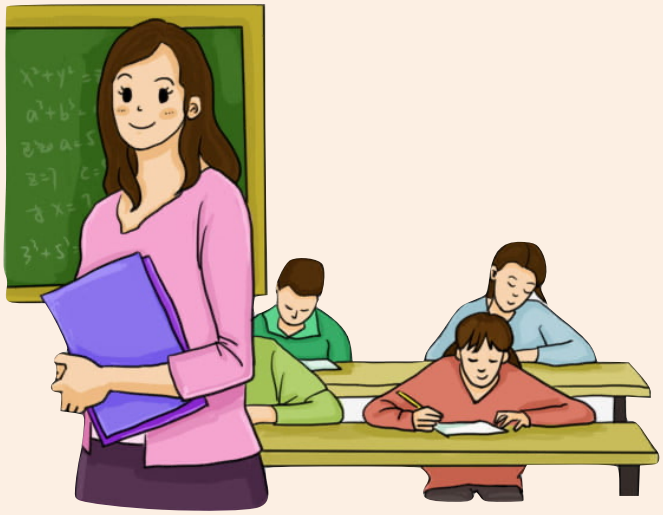
Why a happy teacher is a rarity in the University

RITA SHAH
Department of German



Teachers are the pillars of a society, builders of a nation. They are the means for the intellectual development of young people – the building blocks of society. Teachers are friends, mentors, guides, influencers for the students. They are the most fundamental elements of quality education. Their active participation is the biggest factor in achieving the goal of education of a nation.

In general, if lecturers are satisfied and well motivated, teaching is more effective and can affect students' achievement. Faculty members are motivated by their desire to contribute meaningfully to society, by their interest in working with students and the fulfilment that comes with teaching and guiding them. The intellectual stimulation that comes with being a member of the academy is unparalleled.

What affects faculty motivation?

Faculty motivation has been positively associated with engagement in faculty development activities and utilisation of best practices for teaching. However, there are many factors which bring about de-motivation. Some of them are discussed briefly hereunder.

- *Inadequacy of infrastructure and other resources:* Inadequate number of classrooms, labs and other facilities are the biggest limitation on the teaching faculty, leading to a reduced impact of teaching. Lack of modern and updated computer systems, absence of internet, etc, are problems enough to put the faculties off from giving an efficient performance.
- *Job insecurity:* A lack of career vision can give rise to feelings of insecurity. All employees want to feel a sense of security and longevity in their roles. Providing a sense of security to the teaching faculty will keep them away from stress and hence help them focus more on their curriculum.

- *Feeling under-valued:* If employees feel that their efforts are not being recognised or appreciated, they will soon begin to lack energy and commitment in their role. It is important to celebrate successes and give credit where it is due. Try to make sure that achievements are rewarded – even if it is just with a pat on the back.
- *Salaries and Welfare:* Salary and social welfare policies for lecturers in public universities are determined by government regulations. So many lecturers are not satisfied and do not devote themselves to the work as much as they would want to.
- *Lack of social and academic recognition:* Appropriate awards and rewards can promote a feeling a feeling of being a valued individual of the institution. Lack of recognition can lower job satisfaction and reduce the motivation to put in one's best efforts.
- *Peer relationships:* Good relationships with colleagues and administration has a positive effect on lecturers' engagement and well being.
- *No development opportunities:* Lack of training and promotion opportunities challenge the employees to take on work motivation.
- *Poor leadership:* Effective leadership is an essential factor in the motivation of the staff. If strong leadership is lacking or is negatively affecting the outlook of the team, then certain employees may start to feel demoralised.
- *Conflict:* Conflict in the workplace is hugely detrimental. It is important to keep an eye on any workplace intimidation or bullying. Some employees may feel worried to come forward about issues relating to a fellow colleague, hence causing discomfort in the workplace and his or her performance might be affected.
- *Unrealistic workload:* It is important to keep a check on the expectations and demands that are being placed upon the faculty members. If someone feels overburdened by a large, impossible workload, they can soon become disillusioned, stressed and lose motivation. Inadequate office / working staff can be additional burden on the faculty, making it very difficult for them to carry out their normal routine.
- *Teacher-Student interaction and Student attitude:* This is the most important factor that keeps a faculty motivated. Positive attitude of students towards lecturers is paramount in academic environment which make lecturers have more motivation in their work.

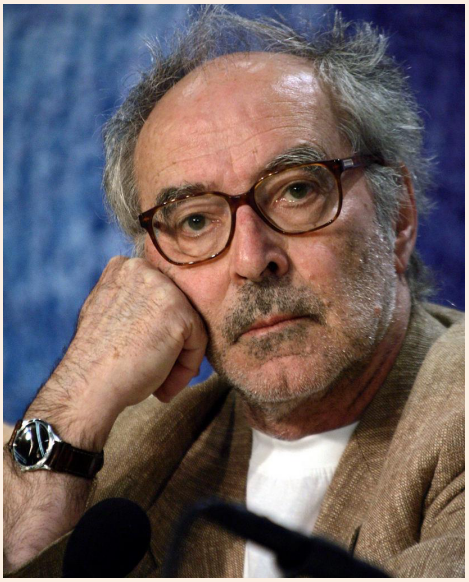
- *Societal, Political and Governmental interference:* Politics and political influence has been seen in many work places. This unwanted influence disturbs the atmosphere of the work place and make it uncomfortable for the working members, hence ruining the whole system.
- *Legally guaranteed issues:* This is another important and a disturbing factor in India. It has its own negative impacts. Incapable and inappropriate people are appointed for reasons other than expertise, which are detrimental to the standard of education.

Although the teaching professionals perform their duties under the influence of so many de-motivating factors, they still kindle the flame of hope burning in their hearts and with the smallest positive cause keep themselves motivated as they do not want to give up on the good cause they have taken up.

It is far too long that the teaching professionals have been neglected and underrated. Unless and until the teachers do not receive the respect and honour they deserve, the educational institutions will never be glorious. This in fact affects the whole education system and the future of the country.

GODARD ADIEU

CHIRASRI BANDYOPADHYAY
Dept. of French



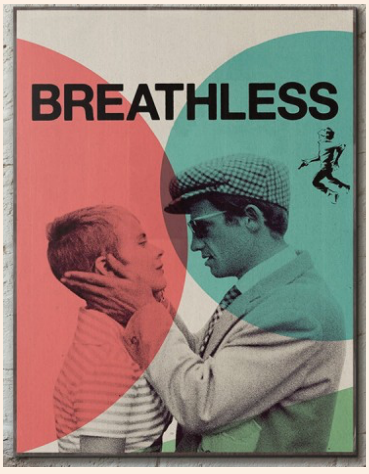
Reckless, revolutionary, compelling – these are the taglines usually attached to the name of the pathbreaking French-Swiss film director, screenwriter and film critic Jean-Luc Godard. Pioneer of the French Nouvelle Vague (New Wave) film movement of the 1960s, he can definitely claim the credit of a filmmaker who "revolutionised the motion picture form". His films aptly fit in the definition of the New Wave movement in their rejection of traditional film-making conventions in favour of experimentation and a spirit of iconoclasm.

Born in Paris on 3rd December, 1930 and having spent a considerable period of time of his life in Switzerland, Godard rose to prominence with his much acclaimed films *Breathless* (1960), *Vivre sa vie* (1962), *Contempt* (1963), *Band of Outsiders* (1964), *Alphaville* (1965), *Pierrot le Fou* (1965), *Masculin Féminin* (1966), *Weekend* (1967), and *Goodbye to Language* (2014). His approach towards and experimentation with narrative, continuity, camerawork and sound made the cinephiles think about the film techniques from a completely different angle.

Not everybody had readily accepted his approach. "'I don't like Godard' is a statement one frequently hears at Film festivals", writes Satyajit Ray in his essay "A Word About Godard." Ray observes, "'like' is a word I seldom use to describe my feeling about truly modern artists… We are variously provoked and stimulated by them, and our appreciation of them is wholly on an intellectual level. Liking suggests an easy involvement of the senses, a spontaneous 'taking to', which I doubt if the modern artist even claims from his public."

It is perhaps this observation that explains the diametrically opposite criticisms of Godard's films – some dismissed him outrightly, others praised him abundantly. Notwithstanding the adverse criticisms, nobody can deny that the playfulness and the audacity, for example, in the movie "Breathless" had definitely swept the audience right up when they stumbled out of the theatre. "A Woman is a Woman", "Alphaville" broke right through the seamlessness and artifice, the illusion of coherence that the audience expect from movies.

He won several prestigious film awards starting from Golden Bear (1965), Golden Lion (1983), Honorary César (1987), Honorary Academy Award (2010). He breathed his last on 13th September, 2022. But his films will forever speak his unique mindset: "He who jumps into the void owes no explanation to those who stand and watch."



Ferdousi from Khorasan (Iran)

MD. SHAMSUDDIN KHAN
Dept. of Persian

Hakeem Abul Qasim Tusi, also known as Ferdousi, is a famous Persian poet who lived in the 10th Century in a village near the city of Tus in the Khurasan region of Iran. His masterpiece is *Shahnameh,* which features the famous characters Rustam and Sohrab, among numerous others.

The epic *Shahnameh*, which literally means the book of kings, consists of 60,000 verses, and traces the history of Iran from its ancient civilisations to the Islamic empire. The book is the national epic of Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan, and has earned for Ferdousi a place alongside Homer.

There is not much information about Ferdousi's life, except that he belonged to a family of landlords and so was his wife. He had a son who died at the age of 37. It is mentioned in *Shahnameh.*

It is said that Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi had offered Ferdousi a sum of gold ashrafi to write a the poem of Shahnameh. But Ferdousi told the Sultan that the entire amount should be paid to him once the Shahnameh was completed. Accordingly, Mahmud Ghaznavi sent him 60,000 gold coins, but the courier betrayed him, leaving Ferdousi suspicious of Mahmud Ghaznavi. After knowing the truth, the Sultan again sent 60,000 gold coins, but when the messenger's caravan entered Tus, people were taking Ferdousi's body to the graveyard.

As for the historical sources and value of *Shahnameh*, Dr. Raza Zadah Shafaq mentions in his book *'Literary History of Iran'*, that *Shahnameh*'s main source is "Avesta". The story of the creation of the universe, details of Kiyani and Kiumaras kings, the stories of Jamsheed, etc. are all derived from Avesta. Some Arabic books are also the source of stories in *Shahnameh.* They were translated from Pahalvi to Arabic. This book is about ancient kings, and contains many important incidents about them. Some unrealistic stories are also attributed to them.

A illustration depicting Rustam and Sohrab

Great is the story it tells, superb is the way it shows

B RAMAKRISHNA
Dept. of Journalism

Mani Ratnam's *Ponniyin Selvan Part 1*, which opened on 30 September, offers a great cinematic experience of an equally great historical episode from a thousand years ago. The best thing is the absence of cringe-inducing over-heroism.

Though the movie takes its time to get the audience invested in the story of Chola king Sundara Chola (played by Prakash Raj) and his children Adithya Karikalan (Vikram), Arulmozhi Varman aka Ponniyin Selvan (Jayam Ravi), and Kundavai (Trisha Krishnan), it really picks up and holds attention once the main dynamic of the story — the succession to the throne — is set off.

The back stories of the characters, their commitments and motivations come through in near flawless performances by all the actors. We see the characters more than the familiar stars, except perhaps Karthi, who plays Vallavarayan Vandiyadevan, a relatively fluid role of a warrior-confidante-messenger with some strains of contemporary protagonists. Aishwarya Rai aces the role of inscrutable Nandini, Sobhita Dhulipala plays Vaanathi, a companion of princess Kundavai, and excels in her song-show. Same with Aishwarya Lakshmi, who plays Poonguzhali, a boat girl whose heart beats for Ponniyin Selvan. Even with no previous knowledge of the story, unfamiliar names and places, we begin to place the characters in their distinct orbits.

The production aesthetic prioritises the story and is not overdone to awe the audience. There are no rousing ceremonies, no glimpses of royal opulence, and no panoramic views of palaces. The familiar politics of associating dark tones with negativity also has no place here: The dark skin tone and clothes are as normal as white or red or any other shade.

Intrigue is the subject rather than royal pronouncements. The challengers of the throne are all insiders, and are as much part of the ruling structure as the heirs. It's their desires, schemes, actions and counteractions that form the content of the film, offering scope for plenty of relatable human drama. One wishes there was a little more conversation between Kundavai and any other character just for sake of experiencing it. Trisha is so magnetic and mesmerising.

The action sequences are fairly elaborate and well-staged but the audience have probably seen more breathtaking shots, and may expect more in terms of thrills. The surprise element in the water scenes in Lanka works well, and remains the only unexplained force in the whole thing: who is the protector of Ponniyin Selvan?

That is for part two, coming in 2023.